Appomattox and After

A FORTIETH ANNIVERSARY WAR STORY

April 9, 1865

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LEE'S army was surrounded at Appomattox on the morning of April 9, 1865, but its lion hearted commander refused to yield until convinced that the situation was hopeless. Several letters had passed between Lee and Grant during the previous twenty-four hours with reference to surrender. Grant asked the surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia to avoid "further effusion of blood." Lee offered to treat for peace.

The Confederates were hemmed in as the lines stood, but there had been doubt in the minds of Lee and his officers the night of April 8 as to whether the Army of the Potomac was all on the field. It was decided at a council of war that General John B. Gordon and General Fitz Lee should attempt to hew a path through Sheridan's ranks on the west and lead the march to Lynchburg.

Robert E. Lee in person repaired to the picket line the morning of the 9th, hoping to meet Grant there for a conference under a flag of truce. He found awaiting him a note from Grant stating definitely that he (Grant) would not treat for peace. Grant at the moment was eight miles distant, and Lee, having learned meanwhile that Gordon and Fitz Lee reported strong columns of Federal infantry on their front as well as Sheridan's cavalry, wrote asking for an interview with Grant to discuss terms of surrender.

The generals met about 1 o'clock at the house of Wilmer McLean, in the village of Appomattox, and the details for the surrender of the Army of Northern Virginia were arranged. The terms were parole of officers and men, with the privilege of going home. The private property of officers paroled was not to be disturbed, and soldiers who claimed horses were allowed to keep them. "They will need them to do their spring plowing," said Grant. The surrender embraced about 28,000 men, but only about 8,000 delivered up muskets. Fitz Lee withdrew his cavalry before the surrender and reached Lynchburg.

The historic Sunday, April 9, 1865, closed with a friendly meeting between the officers and soldiers who had fought one another so zealously for four years. The Federals shared their rations with the southerners, who at times upon this last march had lived upon raw corn.

On the 10th Lee made a farewell address and started for Richmond. Grant set out for Washington the same day to see the president, who had reached there the day before, having left Richmond on the 6th.

On receiving the news of the surrender of Lee, Jefferson Davis abandoned Danville, the new capital of the Confederacy, and started south under a [illegible] escort with considerable treasure in specie. He was captured at Irwinsville, Ga., May 10 and imprisoned at Fortress Monroe. The very last hope of the Confederates, the army under General Joseph E. Johnston, confronting Sherman in North Carolina, surrendered April 26. Other surrenders followed, the last of importance being that of the transmississippi forces May 20. In all 175,000 Confederates were released on parole.

While the surrender of Lee, virtually the end of the war, was hailed with the wildest rejoicing all over the north, there was no unusual demonstration among the victorious troops. General Longstreet said that Grant refused to allow an artillery salute to signalize the event. Lee's surrender had long been expected as a resuk of the Petersburg campaign and was a foregone conclusion after the fall of the city. And yet it took many days for the soldiers to realize that all was over. Grant's troops remained in their old camps around Appomattox, maintaining the usual discipline, with outposts guarding against possible forays by partisan bands.

News of the assassination of Lincoln cast a pall over the army. No one would believe it until it was confirmed. It has been stated that in after years, even in old age, adults of that period remembered distinctly the time of day, the spot where they were, their companions and what they were doing when that awful shock came.

Disbandment of government forces began April 29, detached parties, railway and rendezvous guards being mustered out first. The troops around Appomattox marched to the seaports and were transported by water to Washington. Sherman's army marched from Goldsboro, N. C., to the banks of the Potomac by way of Richmond, Fredericksburg and Manassas. A grand review took place on May 23 and 24, the armies parading on Pennsylvania avenue, where they were reviewed by the commanding generals, President Johnson and his cabinet. [It was on this occasion that Sherman publicly snubbed the secretary of war by refusing to take his proffered hand when greetings were exchanged by the officials at the close of the review.]

Meanwhile the Confederates were walking home all over the south and along the border. Thousands of them didn't tarry for the formality of giving the parole and thousands hid their muskets for future recovery and, when lucky enough to dodge Federal camps en route, took the weapons home. Lee's men were "shy" 20,000 rifles. One incident at Appomattox showed the temper of some "Johnnies" about giving up their guns. Two or three days after the surrender the Federal guard of a farmhouse just outside of Grant's lines saw three Confederates approaching the house, all having their muskets slung across the shoulder by the strap. Two of the party were supporting a third, who could barely walk. The Federals advanced and demanded the surrender of the guns. Two handed them over, but the third, the sick man—he was a boy in his teens—refused and prepared to unsling it for defense. The Federals saw that he was half crazed with sickness and excitement and were lenient. The poor boy in his delirium raged violently and had to be placed on the ground, where he raved on and struggled, trying to draw his gun on the foe. An aged woman tottered forward from the house down the path and recognized the lad as a grandson whose home was in North Carolina. He soon became quiet and died there on the sward after pleading with his last breath, "Tell mother her boy never surrendered." In death his arms were folded across the musket, which lay upon his breast.

The assassination of Lincoln sent the straggling Confederates into hiding for fear of reprisals, although among the Federals there was no disposition to hold the fighting men of the south responsible for that or any other irregular method of warfare. The Confederates were too much rejoiced over peace and the prospect of rejoining their families to indulge in resentment for honorable defeat. They went to work at plowing, as Grant knew they would, inspired by the example of men like Forrest in Tennessee and Major General William Mahone of Virginia, the latter actually bearing a hand in the cornfield himself.

The soldiers of the north, too—and there were a round million of them in arms April 9, 1865—had but one thought, or possibly two—first, to get home somehow quick, and to get there if possible in civilian "togs." The lightning changes of costume made the instant Uncle Sam's mustering out officers had called a soldier's name the last time would have put some of the latter day stage artists to shame. Men had new suits in their knapsacks, in the hands of waiting lackeys or comrades who had got "through" first, stowed in anterooms, in cabs outside, in saloons around the corner. Clothing stores were mobbed by veterans with their hands stuffed with greenbacks. Price and fit were of no account. Then, ho, for the photographer's to get counterfeit presentments to send to distant sweethearts and friends. Cast-

OLD FOES FRATERNIZING AT APPOMATTOX.

off uniforms went to the attic or museum of relics. As a rule, regiments were ordered to their state rendezvous for discharge, and the work was done in vacant halls and old recruit barracks. There were no loving goodbys, either, to the barracks when a veteran shook the dust from his feet to go home—home! The war department during the months of May, June and July forty years ago was bombarded with applications, backed by every sort of "pull," from regiments asking immediate muster out. The veteran who wasn't eager to hurry home and be there for the "glorious Fourth" forgot his peculiarity very quickly and has never cared to recall it. To get home, to get to work, to get back to school, was in the air.

Thrifty and long headed veterans had bought farms or shops or stores by mail, hired out or formed partnerships by mail. Thousands of seminary boys had carried text books in their knapsacks and for months had been brushing up for college. The war was over. Now for business. That is why and that is how an army of a million melted in a day and a million pairs of hands inured to every toil took up the implements of peace. Appomattox was great. The sequel was the grandest of all—peace that never has shown the blush of regret over what it stood for.

The aggregate of Federal enlistments was 2,778,304, representing with re-enlistments about 2,250,000 individuals. The Confederate total was about 1,000,000. The aggregate of deaths from all causes in the Federal army was 359,528, and 110,070 soldiers died in battle. The Confederate loss is unknown.

GEORGE L. KILMER.

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